

Methyl Iodide: Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Why is the Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR) registering methyl iodide?

A: Methyl iodide was registered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA) in 2007 and is being used in 47 other states. Pesticides cannot be sold or used in California unless they are registered by both U.S. EPA and DPR. The department is registering methyl iodide in response to an application submitted by Arysta LifeScience Corp. After several years of assessment beginning in 2007 and an unprecedented level of evaluation, DPR determined that methyl iodide can be used safely under the department's strict health-protective measures.

Pest control decisions by growers are market-driven. DPR ensures that regulations are in place so pesticides can be used safely to protect people and the environment.

Q: What pesticide products containing the fumigant methyl iodide are being registered by the California Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR)?

A: Five pesticide products containing methyl iodide are being registered. They are made by Arysta LifeScience Corp. and sold under the brand name Midas.

Four of the products have California-specific labels: Midas 98.2, Midas 50:50, Midas 33:67 and Midas EC Gold. The fifth product, Iodomethane Technical, is used in manufacturing.

Q: When can methyl iodide be used in California?

A: Methyl iodide will be legal for use in California when the Office of Administrative Law approves emergency regulations designating the fumigant a restricted material. The approval is expected in late December. Restricted materials require a permit from the county agricultural commissioner where the application is proposed. The emergency regulations are necessary so methyl iodide can only be used with a permit from the county agricultural commissioner.

Q: What is an emergency regulation?

A: An emergency regulation is necessary for the immediate preservation of public peace, health and safety, and may become effective pending the completion of the normal and more extended rule-making process. Emergency regulations remain in effect for a 120-day period. Additional information is posted on the Office of Administrative Law's Web site at http://www.oal.ca.gov/Emergency_Regulation_Process.htm

Q: How did the more than 50,000 public comments received by DPR in response to the proposed registration in April affect the final registration decision?

A: Most of the comments received were similar and generated through social media campaigns. They provided no evidence that DPR's stringent use restrictions will not keep exposures to methyl iodide within safe levels. Since DPR announced its proposal to register methyl iodide in April, the use restrictions have been clarified and strengthened, including stricter buffer zones, a requirement that only DPR-approved highly retentive tarps be used, more ground water protections, reduced application rates and stronger protections for workers.

As required by law, DPR prepared a detailed written evaluation and response to comments that raised significant environmental points. It is posted at www.cdpr.ca.gov. Click on "A-Z Index," Methyl iodide registration, then scroll down to the document.

Q: How can methyl iodide affect human health?

A: Because they are intended to control a wide range of pests, fumigants are highly toxic. Toxic effects of methyl iodide are the same as those of iodide, a naturally occurring form of the chemical element iodine commonly found in soil and ground water.

Some methyl iodide breaks down to iodide in the environment and the body. The human body needs the right amount of iodide for good health. However, too much iodide can also be harmful and disrupt thyroid hormones, which can potentially affect pregnancy and cause other health problems.

Q: What is DPR doing to support organic strawberry production?

A: DPR's mission is protecting human health and the environment by regulating pesticide sales and use; and fostering reduced-risk pest management through research, grants and recognition.

Through Pest Management Alliance Grants and IPM Innovator awards, DPR supports reducing pesticide use using integrated pest management (IPM), a strategy to control pests with a combination of natural and preventive strategies and pesticides less toxic than traditional treatments.

In March 2010, DPR recognized eight organizations for reducing pesticide use, including Prather Ranch in Siskiyou County. Prather Ranch was honored for growing organic strawberry nursery plants by rotating strawberry plant cultivation with irrigated pasture intensively grazed by cattle to rebuild the soil and preserve biodiversity. Sadly, the ranch has placed its organic strawberry nursery plant operation on hold because there was limited demand for the product.

More information about Alliance Grants is posted at <http://www.cdpr.ca.gov/dprgrants.htm>.

Additional details about IPM Innovators is posted at <http://www.cdpr.ca.gov/docs/pestmgt/ipminov/innovatr.htm>.